

Conrad Kohrs House
804 Dearborn Avenue
Helena
Lewis and Clark County
Montana

HABS No. MT-32

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CONRAD KOHRS HOUSE

HABS No. MT-32

ADDRESS: 804 Dearborn Ave., Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Montana.

OWNER: James J. Phillips

OCCUPANT: James J. Phillips and various tenants

USE: Residence, Kindergarten and Apartment

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

This house was purchased by Conrad Kohrs in 1900 after he and his wife moved to Helena from their ranch at Deer Lodge. This was Kohrs' home until his death there in 1920.

Kohrs had come to Montana in 1862, prospecting and following the rumors of gold strikes in the Territory. He was employed as a butcher in Bannack, then in Alder Gulch opened his own meat shop. Before long he was buying cattle throughout the state in order to fill the demand for meat. In 1866, he purchased the John F. Grant farm near Deer Lodge and stocked it with breeding cattle. Within a few years, Conrad Kohrs was the largest cattle owner in Montana and the northwest.

The development of the cattle industry in Montana owes much to Kohrs. He introduced shorthorns to the Territory in 1871, and Herefords in 1880. He was also active in the Montana Stockgrowers Association throughout his career.

Theodore Roosevelt was a friend of Kohrs from the 1880's when Roosevelt ranched in the Dakota Territory. In 1911, when the ex-president was on a political tour of the West he dined with Kohrs here in this house.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Conrad Kohrs was born in Holstein, Germany in 1835. The year 1862 found him in Montana in the Deer Lodge Valley. He did some prospecting without much success, then drifted to Bannack where he was employed as a butcher. In 1863, he went to Alder Gulch (Virginia City, Montana) where he opened his own butcher shop. Kohrs returned to the Deer Lodge Valley in 1865, operating a meat market and buying large herds of cattle to supply meat for the mining camps.

In 1866, Kohrs bought the farm that had been established by John H. Grant in 1863, and stocked it with a herd of breeding cattle. Within a few years he and his partner, his half-brother John Bielenberg, were the largest cattle owners in Montana and the northwest. Kohrs was continually interested in improving his stock. In 1871, he purchased shorthorns in Iowa and brought the first of that breed to the state. In 1880, he introduced Herefords to Montana. Kohrs served in the 14th Territorial Legislature, and was a member of the Montana constitutional convention.

Kohrs was an active member of the Montana Stockgrowers Association which was organized in 1885. During this period he became acquainted with Theodore Roosevelt, who was engaging in ranching operations in eastern Montana and western Dakota Territory. This friendship persisted throughout the lives of the two men. When President Roosevelt made a tour through the western states in 1903, he was guest of honor at a banquet in Butte. In a letter to John Hay later, Roosevelt described it: "Old Con Kohrs, a fine boy and an old friend of mine, a member of the Legislature, and an absolutely honest man, was there. He repeated stories of hunting and Indian fighting and prospecting in the early days, and then told the company how he and I some twenty years previously had worked on the cattle ranges together, and had been fellow delegates at the stockmen's meetings in the roaring little cattle town of Miles City."

In 1911, ex-President Roosevelt again made a western tour, this time to investigate political sentiment in the area before again declaring himself a candidate for the presidency. He reached Helena on April 11, and had dinner in the Kohrs home.

Conrad Kohrs and his wife had moved to Helena from their ranch home near Deer Lodge in 1899. They rented this house, which had been built in 1890, from H. A. D'Acheul, Helena business man. Mrs. Kohrs enjoyed the house and made many friends in Helena, so her husband bought the house and presented it to her on their wedding anniversary, February 23, 1900.

In addition to cattle, Kohrs and Bielenberg had extensive mining interests. They owned most of the mining ground in the town of Pioneer, Montana, and built a big ditch to bring water into it. Their operation was the most extensive hydraulic mining in the state at that time.

Conrad Kohrs died in this house on July 21, 1920. His widow continued to live there until 1946, when she sold it to William M. Perry. The present owners, James J. and Nancy M. Phillips, purchased the property in 1963.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND REFERENCES

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- Helena Independent (newspaper), Helena, Montana, July
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- Miller, Joaquin, An Illustrated History of the State
of Montana, Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, 1894.
- Montana Daily Record (newspaper), Helena, Montana,
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ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - 40' wide and 56' deep, exclusive of porches; three story masonry structure with basement.

Foundation - native granite.

Wall Construction - 13" brick bearing walls of common and face brick, with granite lintels, keystones and sills.

Porches - Front porch, east facade: 21'-6" x 7'-0", wood frame with four full and two half columns (wood) and turned balustrade (wood). Rear porch, south wall: 6'-0" x 18'-0". Kitchen entry porch, wood frame having two full columns and two half columns of wood; shed roofed and shingled. Pantry entry, west wall; 6'-0" x 9'-10" wood frame porch with four wood columns, shingled roof.

Openings - Entrances: A single 5' x 9'-3" front doorway containing two 2'-6" x 9'-0" oak sash doors, oak frames and two oak frame screen doors. On the south wall a side doorway 3' x 7' doorway having 2'-8" x 7'-0" sash door with transom. Rear door (into pantry), west wall, one 3' x 7' fir door and casing. Basement has one Majestic cast iron coal door and one 5' x 7' hinged batten door.

Windows: Basement - one pair of 2' x 2' single light sash windows. First floor - D.H. 2/2 wood windows; some fixed sash units; some units have curved frosted top sash. Second floor - D.H. 2/2 wood windows; some have fixed side lights. Third floor - D.H. 2/2 wood windows in gable ends and cupola; some fixed sash; group of three windows in gables.

All windows and doors have oak casing unless

noted. Windows have stone sills, lintels and keystones.

Roof - combination hip and gable roof with cupolas; squared cedar shingles. Approximate pitch 45°.

Chimneys - brick.

INTERIOR

Originally the structure contained eleven rooms in the main portion of the house and five rooms in the rear wing for kitchen, etc., with servants' quarters above. Today the major portion of the north side of the building, on both first and second floors, has been remodeled into an apartment. The information listed below describes the building as it was before the remodeling.

Floor Plan - First Floor: central entry hall; stairway; parlor in the southeast corner and parlor in the northeast corner; library; dining room; kitchen; pantry; back (servants') stair-case.

Second Floor: upper hall; stairway; sitting room, southeast corner; main bedroom; two guest bedrooms; bathroom; two servants' rooms and bath; back stairs.

Third Floor: three maids' rooms; bathroom; stairway.

Ceiling Heights - basement: 9'-4"; first floor: 12'-0"; second floor: 10'-6"; third floor: varies according to roof, but approximately 9'-0".

Floor - The main portion has 1 x 4 T & G oak flooring; inlaid linoleum in kitchen. Floor joists: first floor 2 x 12's 12" o.c.; second floor 2 x 12's 12" o.c.; third floor 2 x 10's 12" o.c.

Wall and Ceiling Finish - Lath and plaster - painted; wallpaper. Ceiling plaster.

Doors - Two sets of large oak sliding doors open off the central entry hall into the parlors. Oak trim. The interior doors are paneled hardwood except in kitchen and servants' quarters.

Trim - oak; mahogany base, shoe and cove, main floor. Second floor has pine mouldings, stained or painted.

Hardware - brass; cast iron in servants' and utility area.

Lighting - electric.

Heating - Magee sectional steam boiler; radiators in rooms.

OTHERS

General Setting - The house is situated on the northwest corner of the intersection of Dearborn and Stuart Streets, facing east.

Enclosure - low brick wall with a stone coping.

Outbuildings - There is a one and a half story brick and frame carriage house with living quarters above. The building is 23' x 26'; masonry first floor. Gable roof is shingled. The building is located on the northwest portion of the site.

Prepared by : John DeHaas
December 1967

Reviewed by: Eleni Silverman, HABS
September 1983